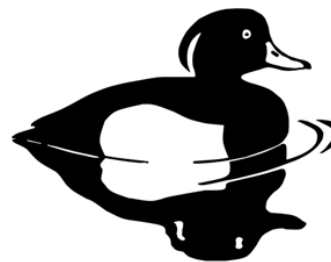


BOC Newsletter

Winter 2016/17

No 71



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Introduction

I'm writing this during that spell that often happens between Christmas and New Year, after all the guests have left, most of the Christmas 'debris' has been cleared away and the house acquires a certain peaceful serenity. A perfect time to reflect on important questions like: Was the turkey as good as the previous year? Did the presents go down well with the recipients? Have I put on weight? etc. Of course some people go away for Christmas or get invited to someone else's, and I would suggest that they are probably the lucky ones (much though we love having the family around ;-). Anyway, however you spent your Christmas, I hope it was a good one and that the New Year will be all that you would hope for.

On the winter birds front, the most noticeable thing so far seems to have been the very large numbers of winter thrushes – our garden has had a few of visits by Mistle Thrushes and Fieldfares, and a veritable invasion of Redwings which made quick work of every single berry on the various bushes. No chance (yet again) of a visit from any passing Waxwings this winter!

I look forward to seeing you at events in the New Year – there are some excellent indoor talks coming up in the next few months, along with the popular Photographic Competition evening in early March (see item below for further information). And also a variety of outdoor trips to tempt you out of the house!

Please note that the next newsletter will go out by the end of March, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by Friday 17th March 2017.

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As always, many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

Photographic Competition

This takes place on 8 March and we are hoping for the usual tough challenge for our judges this year. The rules are exactly the same as in 2016 so you can enter up to nine images, three in each of the three categories, ie, Portrait, Action/behaviour or Flight. There will be prizes for all category winners and runners up and the overall winner will win the Gordon Lansbury Memorial Trophy.



Colin needs the entries sent to him by 20th February to give time for the preparation of the evenings entertainment. Please email entries to wilson.blakeney@gmail.com - Each image should be labelled with the species of bird and all initials of the photographer. This saves a lot of time in sorting the images. Files in excess of 2 or 3 MB may cause problems with email etc so please try to limit the size.

So, now is the time to sort those best images out and prepare them for one of our most popular evenings.....

Upcoming Indoor Meetings

Wednesday January 11th 2017

David Lindo, The Urban Birder, Broadcaster and writer : **Tales from the Concrete Jungles**

David is renowned for his ability to locate and enjoy birds in an urban environment and has visited some 270 cities in all. He will focus on the significant locations of just five cities, where he met local conservationists and, of course, the birds.

Wednesday January 25th 2017

Niall Burton, BTO researcher : **Seabirds in a changing environment**

Niall brings his experience as a top expert on the topic to speak about the BTO's contribution to seabird monitoring and research in the UK.

Wednesday February 8th 2017

Renton Righelato, BOC : **The Atlantic Rainforests of Brazil**

Renton discusses the Mata Atlantica, the most biodiverse zone east of the Andes. While 97% of South America's Atlantic Rainforest has been lost, conservation projects here are starting to bring it back – and its birds too.

Wednesday February 22nd 2017

Martyn Kenefick : **Birding Trinidad & Tobago from the Asa Wright Nature Centre**

Martyn presents the inside story of the birding opportunities provided at this iconic centre, which sits right on the shoulder of South America on a forested mountain side.

Wednesday March 8th 2017

Photographic Competition : Our annual photofest of birdlife, judged by two professional photographers.

Wednesday March 22nd 2017

Kate Risely, BTO Garden BirdWatch Organiser : **Garden Birds**

Kate considers the effects that the £200 million a year garden bird food industry has on different species, and explains some ways in which the food we provide affects wild bird populations.

Wednesday April 5th 2017

Ray Reedman : **LD. Workshop: Waterside birds**

Some pointers to identifying such as grebes, rails, herons and their allies. The talk will cover aspects of seasonal plumages and behaviour, and will include some rare visitors.

AGM 2016

The 2016 AGM was a quiet affair, although we only just made our constitutional quorum of 40! The business of the evening included the election of officers, officer's reports and a report of the county's birding highlights (as shown in the item below).

For those who weren't able to attend, the election of offices went as follows :-

Chair – No nominations (please let the Committee know if you could be interested in this role, or know of someone who might be interested)

Secretary – Sally Wearing, proposed by the Committee and duly elected

Treasurer – **Eleanor Pitts**, proposed by the Committee and duly elected

Election of Ordinary Members of the Committee

There were 4 vacancies for the usual three year term, with 4 nominations:-

Andy Horscroft, Adrian Lawson, John Swallow, Jake Bishop - all of whom were duly elected

The meeting was also introduced to the new Berkshire County Recorder, **Richard Burness**

Birding Highlights of 2016

by Ken Moore

DECEMBER 2015: On the 1st of December, a notable murmuration of more than 5,000 STARLINGS over the reedbeds at the THATCHAM NATURE DISCOVERY CENTRE (think back 50 years when winter flocks on the Downs were counted in millions!). The 3rd had a FIRECREST feeding with a Goldcrest in a Twyford garden, with another the same day at Lavells Lake. On the 6th a drake FERRUGINOUS DUCK on Sandford Lake at Dinton and then on the 7th a red-head SMEW at Searles Farm Lane, followed on the 8th by the now annual drake RING-NECKED DUCK at Bray GP. Cow Down on the 9th had 100 plus CORN BUNTING, 12 GOLDEN PLOVER, a MERLIN and a HEN HARRIER. On the 13th a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER flew across Padworth Lane GP and a SHORT-EARED OWL was at Westley Mill, Twyford. The highlight of the month was perhaps the BLACK-THROATED DIVER at QMR on the 20th, followed by a CATTLE EGRET seen, briefly, at Spencers Wood on the 21st. On Boxing Day CASPIAN GULL and BONAPARTES GULL were reported at Lower Farm GP, no doubt an interesting discussion for the Berkshire Record Committee should any descriptions be received. On the same day, a BITTERN was at Lavells Lake, Dinton Pastures. Finally, up to 1000 GOLDEN PLOVER around Thames Valley Park- seen from Lavell's Lake.



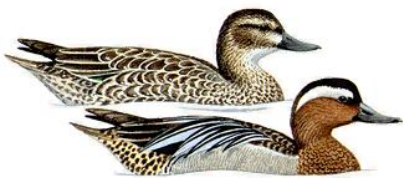
JANUARY 2016: The first day of JANUARY had the possibly returning drake SMEW of the past two winters at Moor Green Lakes, then a single BRENT GOOSE at Lower Farm GP the following day. On the 4th, 27 GOOSANDER were at Grove Lake, Moor Green Lakes, on the 5th, a COMMON SCOTER at QMR and an ill KITTIWAKE there five days later on the 10th. The 15th January - quite an interesting day - 16 COMMON CROSSBILL seen in Swinley Forest, a single HAWFINCH 'scoped from the track up from Combe Church and a 1st winter RING OUZEL was skulking beside the Ridgeway at Bury Down. On the 21st, the Grove Lake GOOSANDERS were up to 54. On the 28th a first-winter GLAUCOUS GULL was at Knowl Hill, 2 JACK SNIFE were found at a private site in the Kennet Valley and a group of 10 RAVEN at Combe. Then on the 30th, the afternoon was enlivened at Lower Farm GP by the arrival of 14 PINTAIL and at QMR by a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.

FEBRUARY: The first returning OYSTERCATCHERS arrived on the 3rd visiting both Hosehill and Main Pit, Theale. The following day, a SHORT-EARED OWL was seen hunting over Larks Hill. The first-winter RING OUZEL was still on the Ridgeway on the 14th - there have not been many wintering RING OUZELS in Berkshire over the years. A FIRECREST was first seen high up in the Willows opposite the Main Entrance to Padworth Lane GP on the 25th February and stayed in the area until 14th March at least.



MARCH: On the 5th a CURLEW could be viewed from the swing-bridge at Bottom Lane Floods, then on the 15th, 5 REDSHANK were at Padworth Lane GP. A single RUFF at Fobney Meadows on 19th March with a pair of GARGANEY. On the same day, a male MARSH HARRIER flew east over Woolhampton GP and two ROCK PIPITS were at QMR. A KITTIWAKE was briefly on the shoreline at Hosehill on March 29th, also a drake COMMON SCOTER on Theale Main Pit the same day whilst the following day a BLACK-TAILED GODWIT was at Hosehill and two WHEATEAR at Burnthouse Lane. At least 90 GOLDEN PLOVER were at Greenham Common on the 31st, a single WHITE WAGTAIL the same day at QMR and 27 CROSSBILL at Crowthorne Wood.

APRIL: The first Berkshire Yellow Wagtail of the year, naturally a male, and a WATER PIPIT at Burnthouse Lane GP on the 6th, and a male COMMON REDSTART at Combe Gibbet. Two pairs of GARGANEY were recorded together at the beginning of the month at Fobney, with one staying on to the end of April. On the 13th, two SANDWICH TERNS were at QMR and on the same day a SLAVONIAN GREBE coming into summer plumage was at Woolhampton GPs. Another SLAVONIAN GREBE was at Main Pit, Theale on the 16th. On the 23rd, a SHORT-EARED OWL in the Fireplane area at Greenham Common with 3 RING OUZEL, a WHINCHAT and two WHEATEAR. On the same day, a GREAT WHITE EGRET was seen flying over Lower Farm GP.



MAY: GREENSHANKS arrived on the 5th May - two at Lea Farm and one each at New Workings, Moor Green Lakes and Hosehill Lake. Two BLACK TERNS were at Fobney Island on the same day. Three days later (8th May), possibly the same two BLACK TERNS were at Main Pit, Theale. A WOOD SANDPIPER was at New Workings, Moor Green on the 6th, with at least six GREENSHANK. On the 10th, 2 TURNSTONE, 4 DUNLIN, 2 SANDERLING, a GREY PLOVER, a COMMON SANDPIPER and finally 3 RINGED PLOVER were at the New Workings too. On the next day, at the New Workings were 2 GREY PLOVER, a WHIMBREL and a REDSHANK. At Theale Main Pit, also on the 11th, there were two BLACK-NECKED GREBES, a BLACK TERN and six ARCTIC TERNS. Twenty HOBBIES were around the Rowney Predator Lake at Woolhampton GPs on the 15th. A STONE CURLEW was located by the Fireplane at Greenham Common on the 20th. Then at QMR on the 21st May there were 2 WHIMBREL, 5 SANDERLING and 4 RINGED PLOVER. On the 23rd at Main Pit, Theale were a total 9 OYSTERCATCHERS including four adult-sized juveniles.



JUNE: On the 3rd a female MARSH HARRIER was hunting over East Marsh, Dorney Wetlands and a HONEY BUZZARD was photographed over Windsor Great Park on the 5th. There was a notably high count of MUTE SWAN at Windsor Promenade on the 8th June: a total of 251. On the 11th a pair of GARGANEY arrived at Lower Farm GP - starting to moult into eclipse.

JULY: On the 23rd July, there was an adult BLACK-TAILED GODWIT on Hosehill, seven more on the flood at Eton Wick on 25th and on the 27th another five at BURNTHOUSE LANE.

AUGUST: The summering COMMON REDSTART at Lower Farm was present until at least 9th August, with a GREAT WHITE EGRET arriving on the 10th and staying for quite a while. On 15th another HONEY BUZZARD was seen well and notes and photos taken - at New Workings, Moor Green Lakes. A juvenile GARGANEY arrived at Hosehill on the 20th and stayed until the 11th September at least. Yet another HONEY BUZZARD at Moor Green Lakes was reported on the 27th

SEPTEMBER: A total of 25 ARCTIC TERNS were at QMR on the 5th, mostly juveniles. The New Workings at Moor Green had a total of three LITTLE STINTS on the 6th. On the 8th, alternating between Main Pit, Theale and Moatlands, four SANDWICH TERNS. On the 10th there was a KNOT at QMR and perhaps the bird of the year - a LEACHES PETREL. Moor Green Lakes did not want to be left out - held a CURLEW SANDPIPER the following day. Then it was back to QMR for the rest of the month - two AVOCET very briefly on the 14th, followed by an immature SABINES GULL on the 20th and finally for the month, on the 29th, a PECTORAL SANDPIPER.

OCTOBER: A YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER was trapped and ringed at Moor Green Lakes on the 9th and a ringtail HEN HARRIER was seen over Combe Gibbet the same day. A late OSPREY drifted over Lavells Lake, Dinton on the 14th, eight GOOSANDER flew into Lower Farm GP, staying for just three minutes on the 20th. On the 26th GREAT GREY SHRIKES arrived at both Wishmoor Bottom and Cow Down. On the last day of October seven WATER RAILS were counted at Fobney Meadows.



NOVEMBER: In Swinley Forest, between the Upper and Lower Star Posts, on the 8th were 14 CROSSBILL. On the 9th three COMMON SCOTER were on Main Pit, Theale. Returning BITTERNs were first seen at Dinton Pastures on the 18th. On the 23rd a possible drake SCAUP was reported from Moatlands GP, seen again on the 24th - but was it a genuine SCAUP, or a hybrid? That debate continues..... However, on the 24th it was in close company with a juvenile SCAUP. On the 25th a female/immature FERRUGINOUS DUCK was reported from Moatlands and on the next day, the first winter period male FERRUGINOUS DUCK returned to Dinton Pastures.

30 Years of IBIS (International Journal of Avian Sciences of the British Ornithological Union)

As mentioned at the indoor meeting on October 5th, John Farnsworth has donated the above (1986-2015 (120 journals with only 1 missing)) to the Club in the expectation that a Club member would like to receive them. A suggestion is that the new owner(s) would consider making a modest donation to the Club's Conservation Fund. Handover could be organised e.g. at a future indoor meeting (or elsewhere). Suggest that a car would be needed for transportation!

Please contact John on 01628 824214 if you are interested.

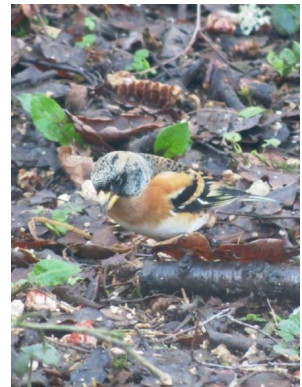
BOC Trip to Blashford Lakes and the Blackwater Arboretum – January 2016

It was wet start and the westerly wind was brisk to say the least, so it was good to see eight stalwarts assembled at Blashford Lakes visitor centre at 9.30 a.m.

The Tern Hide at Ibsley Water was now accessible after being flooded earlier in the week, but the wind tended to keep the birds closer to the more-distant lee-shores on this large and exposed surface. Birds were not easy to see in the choppy water, but they were plentiful and included Pochard, Tufties, Wigeon, and Teal, but above all a good number of beautiful Pintails. Goldeneyes were also present in moderate numbers. On the far bank two Buzzards appeared to be feeding on washed-out worms. We scoured the water for the small grebes reported present and eventually found a Slavonian. It was more than an hour before someone spotted a distant Black-necked Grebe, and that was when the head-shape and proportions of black and white were examined critically before all were convinced. Meanwhile we had located a Great Crested and two or three Little Grebes. Four out of the five species in one go! There were a good many immature large gulls, but we identified one very definite Yellow-legged Gull among them. There were dozens of Black-headed, but suddenly someone spotted the arrival of an adult Ring-billed Gull, which was keeping company with the larger gulls. We had excellent views of it alongside them before it flew to sit alone in choppy water.

We moved back to woodland area and Ivy Lake for the second half of the morning. The Woodland Hide provided the usual array of tits and finches, including Lesser Redpolls, Siskins, and a couple of Bramblings, plus Nuthatches and a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Some of you may have read that there had been an unpleasant scuffle the week before at Ivy Lake North, as observers vied to get clear views of a Bittern from the tiny side-window. For us there was no Bittern and no scuffle, but I have to say that the tinted, fixed windows there are highly-frustrating for 90% of those sat in the hide, Bittern or not. Is this in fact the worst hide in the region? The screens to the east side and the South Hide produce far better views of a lake which can host a good variety of species. For us, from the latter position, a single Common Gull, sitting persistently head-on, had just enough resemblance to the Ring-billed to be temporarily deceptive.



As we finished lunch, we were distracted by a Tree Creeper near the car park. Harry then introduced us to a 'Martin Sell' short-cut over the open heath to Bolderwood and thence down to the Blackwater Arboretum. It was still windy and the tree-tops were fairly lively, so when someone eventually spotted a couple of Hawfinches, they had dived straight into some ivy halfway up a deciduous tree. We watched the patch intently as they shuffled around and everyone managed to see at least one. I have had better sessions there: even the supporting cast was very poor that afternoon.

Thanks to Marcus I'Anson, who had made his debut as volunteer leader. He has also taken on the autumn weekend trip to Norfolk later in the year, which was a great success (see below).

Footnote:

The following week I returned to the site with two friends who had missed the previous visit. We saw the Bittern, added such as Green Sandpiper, Goosander, Bullfinch and Caspian Gull, but didn't find the Ring-billed Gull. At the Arboretum several Hawfinches landed at the top of the trees and giving fine views in the setting sun. Such is the nature of weather and luck combined!

Ray Reedman

Come and join the BOC walks and trips!!

I joined BOC a year or so ago. The knowledge displayed in indoor meetings has always made me feel in awe of other members. So it was with some trepidation that we (+ husband) signed up for a BOC three day trip to Norfolk.

Would we end up feeling like idiots? Would I be the only one carefully watching a burst balloon up a tree? Would my vulture turn out to be a linnet etc etc? In fact it was wonderful – though we did miss the albatross!

Marcus was a brilliant trip leader who took incredible care over details – accommodation, food and the birds. He cared about us all. He cared that we should all see what was there. Everyone was generous with information, conversation, hints on what to look for, patient while we looked, and all with tremendous friendliness and good humour.

There were choices too. No-one got up at silly o'clock. Two people (won't give their names...but they know who they are!) did not get up for the pre-breakfast short strolls, and it did not matter. The pace was easy and the days relaxed – not frenzied at all, as I had imagined. When we drove in a convoy it was always with care to make sure that everyone was still following.

I thought that the BOC trips would be oversubscribed and really only for the experts. If you are thinking this too and it stops you from joining in a walk or a trip DON'T THINK IT ANYMORE – come along!! It was great!!

Eleanor Pitts

Editor's Note: **Details of all upcoming outdoor trips and excursions can be found on the Club Programme Card, or on the Club's Web site at www.berksoc.org.uk**

Solution to Crossword in Last Newsletter

I'm sure that you all successfully completed the last crossword but, just in case you got stuck, here is the solution.

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| 1B | 2U | 3N | 4T | 5I | N | 6G | 7D | O |
| I | 8L | O | U | N | G | E | 9U | 10S |
| 11T | U | R | N | S | T | O | N | E |
| T | L | T | D | E | 12S | L | 13M | E |
| E | A | H | R | 14C | L | O | U | D |
| 15R | 16H | E | A | 17T | A | G | S | 18F |
| N | 19E | R | 20R | A | T | I | C | L |
| 21O | R | N | A | T | E | 22S | L | Y |
| 23K | N | O | T | 24C | I | T | E | S |